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Our Little Secrets

Anatomy of a Swindle

By Jeffrey St Clair

As you drive across central Utah on Interstate 70, you are likely to be captivated by a golden bulge of sandstone gleaming in the sun to the south. This is the San Rafael Swell, a knot of canyons, domes and cliffs that marks the beginning of the redrock country of the Four Corners region. The old desert rat Edward Abbey praised the Swell as one of the most austere and beautiful places in the desert Southwest.

Naturally, the Swell, underlain with coal seams and pools of oil, has long been prized by other less aesthetically minded interests: strip miners and oil and gas companies. Much of the area lies under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, never known as the greenest of federal agencies. Still, because most of the Swell remains in a roadless and relatively unscathed condition it has been difficult for the BLM to get away with simply opening it up to mining and drilling. Lawsuits and endangered species keep getting in the way. Environmentalists have long sought to turn the area into a wilderness or national park.

Enter Steven Griles, deputy secretary of interior and former lobbyist for oil and mining interests. Already under investigation for bullying the Bureau of Land Management on behalf of his former oil industry clients, Griles is now at epicenter of a new scandal involving the proposed swap of more than 135,000 acres of land in the heart of the San Rafael Swell to the state of Utah in exchange for parcels of state-owned land totalling 108,000 acres. The deal, which was shelved in late July follow-

(**OLS** *continued on page 2*)

Iraq Diary

By PATRICK COCKBURN

There used to be a mosaic of President George Bush on the floor at the entrance to the al-Rashid Hotel in Baghdad. It was placed there soon after the first Gulf War in 1991 and was a good likeness, though the artist gave Bush unnaturally jagged teeth and a slightly sinister grimace. The idea was that nobody would be able to get into the hotel, where most foreign visitors to Iraq stayed in the 1990s, without stepping on Bush's face. The mosaic did not long survive the capture of the city on April 9 and the takeover of the al-Rashid by US officials and soldiers. One American officer, patriotically determined not to place his foot on Bush's features, tried to step over the mosaic. The distance was too great. He strained his groin and had to be hospitalised. The mosaic was removed.

Almost all of the thousands of pictures of Saddam which used to line every main street in Baghdad have gone, though for some reason the one outside the burned-out remains of the old Mukhabarat—Intelligence—headquarters survives. My favourite was straight out of The Sound of Music: it showed Saddam on an Alpine hillside, wearing a tweed jacket, carrying an alpenstock and bending down to sniff a blue flower.

Other equally peculiar signs of Saddam's presence remain. The Iraqi Natural History Museum was thoroughly ransacked by looters, who even decapitated the dinosaur in the forecourt. In the middle of one large ground-floor gallery almost the only exhibit still intact is a stuffed white horse which, when living, belonged to Saddam. Wahad Adnan Mahmoud, a painter who also looks after the gallery, told me the horse had been given to the Iraqi leader in 1986 by the King of Morocco. The King had sent a message along with it saying he hoped that Saddam would ride the horse through the streets of Baghdad when Iraq won its war with Iran. Before this could happen, however, a dog bit the horse, and it died. Saddam issued a Republican Decree ordering the dog to be executed.

'I don't know why the looters didn't take the horse—they took everything else,' complained Mahmoud, who was in the wreckage of his office painting a picture of Baghdad in flames. 'It isn't even stuffed very well.' The horse, he added, was not the only dead animal which had been sent from Saddam's Republican Palace to be stuffed by the museum. One day an official from the Palace had arrived with a dead dolphin in the back of a truck. He said the leader wanted it stuffed. The museum staff protested that this was impossible because a dolphin's skin contained too much oil. Mahmoud laughed as he recalled the terrified expression on the official's face when told that Saddam's order could not be obeyed.

Saddam had three enthusiasms in the 1990s, two of which still affect the appearance of Baghdad. Soon after defeat in Kuwait he started obsessively building palaces for himself and his family. None of these is likely to be knocked down since they now serve as bases for the US Army and the Coalition Provisional Authority, as the occupation administration is called. Paul Bremer, the head of the CPA, has his headquarters in the enormous Republican Palace beside the Tigris, where he and his staff live in an isolation comparable to Saddam's. Then, in the mid-1990s, Saddam began to build enormous mosques, the largest of which, the Mother of Battles mosque at the old Muthana municipal airport, was only begin-

(**Iraq Diary** *continued on page 3)*

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Our Little Secrets

ing a scathing internal review by the interior department's Inspector General, would have bilked the federal government out of ten of millions of dollars and opened habitat for rare species to unrestricted plunder.

Under a scheme hatched by Utah congressmen Chris Cannon and James Hansen, more than 130,000 acres of BLM land in the Swell would have been handed to the state of Utah in exchange for 107,000 acres of state lands. The congressmen promoted the deal as "fair value exchange", meaning that the market value of the lands being traded was roughly equal, a requirement of federal land law. To rub salt in the wound, the deal was pitched as an environmentally benign transaction.

But this was nonsense and most people inside the BLM knew it. Biologists warned that the federal lands harbored the desert tortoise, an endangered species, and thus could not be traded away. Geologists disclosed that the federal land contained a trove of minerals and natural gas deposits, while the state lands were nearly worthless economically and offered little in the way of ecological value. One BLM officer in Utah noted that the oil, gas, coal and shale deposits alone on the federal lands "could bring in hundreds of millions of dollars".

Agency land appraisers fired off internal memos saying that the appraisals had been deliberately cooked to make the grossly inequitable deal appear like a bargain for the feds. One memo said that the official appraisal, approved by Griles, was "one-sided and inaccurate". The appraisal approved by Griles and his cohorts valued the state and federal lands at about $35 million each. But BLM appraisers in Utah determined that the federal lands were worth at least $117 million more than the state lands. In an internal memo to BLM director Kathleen Clarke, Dave Cavanagh, the agency's chief land appraiser, pointed out that the deal "generously inflated the value of the state lands to the disadvantage of the BLM". He also warned that public statements by officials in the Interior department that the deal had been scrutinized by independent appraisers were "potentially misleading to the public".

Clarke dismissed the concerns of her line officers, hid the real numbers from skeptical members of congress, such as Rep. Nick Rahall, the West Virginia Democrat, and pursued the deal anyway.

Clarke has maintained that she recused herself from all matters related to the deal in order to avoid a conflict of interest. But the IG report revealed that in March of 2002, Clarke met with Sally Wisely, the BLM's top officer in Utah. Wisely told the IG's investigators that she had requested the meeting in order to relay her fears that the deal was being rushed through without enough attention being given to the concerns of the appraisers and geologists. Clarke, just a stooge for Griles, said it was a done deal.

Griles's lieutenant in the Utah land exchange was Thomas Fulton, the deputy assistant secretary of Interior for Lands and Minerals Management. Fulton handled the negotiations with the state of Utah and the congressional delegation and may end up being the fall guy in the affair.

In the summer of 2002, BLM appraiser Kent Wilkinson went public with his objections to the deal. The whistleblower said that the swindle was one of the most one-sided land deals since the sale of Manhattan. "This is like Enron all over again," Wilkinson wrote in a broadcast email to journalists, which accompanied his analysis of the deal. "They're cooking the books and it's all to the detriment of the public." Wilkinson's revelations prompted a fit from Rep. Chris Cannon, the pudgy Utah congressman. Cannon called Wilkinson a publicity-seeking liar and a stooge of environmentalists. He summoned the appraiser's boss to his office and demanded that "strong measures" be taken against the whistleblower for insubordination. "I want to make sure they get slapped hard, because they're acting inappropriately," Cannon blustered.

With a congressional bounty on his head, Wilkinson brought his concerns to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a whistleblower protection group and one of the worthiest environmental outfits inside the Beltway. PEER went on the offensive against Cannon and recruited help from Jack McDonald, the former chief appraiser for the BLM in Utah. "This is just another rip-off," McDonald told the Washington Post last year. "What does it tell you when an agency suppresses its own professionals? The agency's got something to hide."

But none of this stopped Cannon from proceeding with the deal. The measure was pushed through the House last fall without debate, but Congress adjourned before the senate could act on it. The question now is how far will the investigation go up the Interior Department food chain. Another IG report has been launched into Clark and Griles's conflicts of interest in the deal, which now appears to be dead. Don't look for any prosecutions, though. Ashcroft has already taken a pass on pressing any criminal charges against Griles, Clark and Fulton for the swindle. But the land exchanges go on, many with similar accounting hi-jinks and lopsided appraisals.

In the next year alone, more than a million of acres of federal land will be secretly traded away to states and corporations. This is the dream of the Sagebrush Rebels finally come true: the federal estate is steadily being turned over to private hands unencumbered by noisome environmental regulations. "Despite some pretty damning revelations of what these people have done, you don't get a very good idea of what's going to happen to them," says Janine Blaeloch, director of the Seattle-based Western Lands Exchange Project, the only group in the nation fighting these rip-offs. "This case shows how poisonous these land deals are, especially in places like Utah where the politicians want to privatize all public lands."

Summer Time

We publish 22 issues a year. As in 2003, we are publishing just one issue in July (the one you are now enjoying) and one in August. In September we pick up with the regular biweekly schedule. CP

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ning to rise from its foundations when the regime collapsed. Saddam's third craze, beginning about three years ago, was more surprising. He started to write novels. He dictated them to his secretaries and they were published anonymously in cheap editions, but Iraqis were left in no doubt as to the author. The critical response was adulatory, the print run enormous. After the fall of Baghdad, documents were found in the Mukhabarat headquarters instructing agents to buy the books and get their contacts to do the same. Copies of his most recent novel, The Impregnable Fortress, as well as an earlier volume called Zabiba and the King, are still for sale in the Friday book market on al-Mutanabbi Street.

They can't do much about the palaces and mosques Saddam built, but the US Army and the CPA are obsessed with removing every mention of his name from Baghdad. You can't enter the main children's hospital without walking through a stream of raw sewage, and on some days there is no electricity or water, but earlier this month two cranes were at work removing large green overhead signs for Saddam International Airport. The US officials now in charge of Iraq seem to believe that their problems will be over if all evidence of Saddam's existence is eliminated. This obsession explains in part the political failure of the US and Britain after their swift military victory. Their demonisation combined with Saddam's own personality cult to produce a picture of Iraqi society as being wholly dominated by one man. In fact the regime's support base was always narrow—this was the reason for its exceptional cruelty.

Iraqis were never going to welcome the US and British Armies with cheering crowds hurling flowers. Many had long believed that Saddam was a CIA agent, or at the very least could not have risen to power and held it without US backing. It is, nevertheless, extraordinary that in only three months the US has managed to generate such fury against its occupation. Guerrilla actions have so far been limited, but they are popular. In the middle of June two men drove up to US soldiers guarding a propane gas station near al-Dohra power station in south Baghdad and opened fire. One of the soldiers was shot through the neck and killed and the other was wounded in the arm. An hour or so later I asked the crowd standing around a pool of drying blood on the broken pavement what they thought of the shooting. They all said they approved of it, and one man said he was off to cook a chicken in celebration.

A month later the attacks have spread to the centre of Baghdad. I was waiting outside the National Museum, where the CPA had arranged a brief showing of the 3000-year-old golden treasure of Nimrud, whisked for the occasion from the vaults of the Central Bank, to demonstrate that life was getting back to normal. Suddenly there was a six-minute burst of firing on the other side of the museum. It is a measure of the chaos in Baghdad that this turned out to be the result of two quite separate incidents. The first was a funeral: as is normal in Iraq, people were firing their guns into the air as a sign of grief. The American troops on the roof of the museum thought they were under attack and shot back. But most of the gunfire was in response to somebody firing a rocket-propelled grenade into an American Humvee in Haifa Street, wounding several soldiers. The surviving soldiers had then opened fire indiscriminately and killed a passing driver. As the Americans withdrew, the crowd, dancing in jubilation, set fire to the already smouldering Humvee.

A week after I had been to look at Saddam's stuffed horse, Richard Wild, a young British freelance journalist, went to the Natural History Museum to get a story about its destruction by looters. He was a tall man with close-cropped blond hair and he was wearing a white shirt and khaki trousers. To an Iraqi he may have looked as if he were working for the CPA. As he stood in a crowd outside the museum a man walked up behind him and shot him in the back of the head, killing him instantly.

There are 55,000 US troops in and around Baghdad but they seem curiously vulnerable. They largely stick to their vehicles; there are very few foot-patrols. They establish checkpoints and search cars, but usually have no interpreters. 'Mou mushkila—no problem,' one driver said when asked to open the trunk of his car. 'Don't contradict me,' a soldier shouted. Military vehicles are often stuck in horrendous traffic jams (because of the electricity shortage the traffic lights are not working) making them an easy target for grenades. Just before the attack in Haifa Street I was talking to an American soldier outside the National Museum. The tag on his shoulder read 'Old Ironsides'. I asked him what unit this referred to. He replied: 'The First Armoured Division, the finest armoured division in the world.' But tanks and heavy armour are not much use in Baghdad. A few hours later a sniper shot dead another soldier as he sat in his Bradley fighting vehicle by the gates of the museum.

Outside Baghdad the Army has been conducting search missions in the villages and giving them such names as 'Desert Scorpion'. The press office puts out statements proudly listing the number of detainees and arms captured and suspicious amounts of money discovered. Villagers protest that they have always had weapons, and need them more than ever because of looters. They also have large amounts of cash, often in $100 bills. Iraqis haven't kept much of their money in banks since Saddam closed them just before the first Gulf War. When they reopened the Iraqi dinar was worth only a fraction of its former value.

The guerrilla war doesn't approach the scale of that in Lebanon in 1983-84 or Northern Ireland in the 1970s and is mostly confined to Sunni Muslim areas, but it is growing in intensity. It is damaging to the US because press coverage can no longer be controlled. Every time a US soldier is shot a horde of television reporters and print journalists descend on the scene. The CPA is very conscious of the fact that it will be more difficult for George W. Bush to win re-election next year on the back of victory in Iraq when US television is still showing pictures of dead and wounded soldiers.

The US allowed the Iraqi state to dissolve overnight. They ignored the mass looting for weeks. They took seriously the advice given by exiled Iraqi groups which had no support within the country.

Many of the mistakes the US and British made after the war were very obvious. They allowed the Iraqi state to dissolve overnight. They ignored the mass looting for weeks. They took seriously the advice given by exiled Iraqi groups which had no support within the country. They allowed the civilians in the Pentagon systematically to marginalise the rest of the Administration in Washington. Above all, they were over-con-

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Space Conspiracies

The Return of the Alien Visitor

BY SCOTT HANDLEMAN

Why did the Bush administration *really* attack Iraq? Oil, military Keynesianism or political distraction— none of these answers is fully satisfactory. At last a new explanation has been proffered courtesy of Dr. Michael Salla, a think-tank researcher who has worked at American University, George Washington U., and Australian National University. According to Salla, the Second Gulf War was determined by "the need to gain unfettered access to Iraq's extraterrestrial heritage." Salla opposed the war and now advocates a UN mandate in the administration of Iraq.

Salla explains that Sumerian civilization was founded by advanced beings called the Anunnaki (Sumerian for "those who came from Heaven to Earth"). The Anunnaki visit was recorded in ancient cuneiform texts, translated by Zecharia Sitchin in 1976. Sitchin's translation was discounted by mainstream archaeologists but according to Scalla, it intrigued "clandestine organizations" in America and Europe, including the CIA. These groups have since wished to excavate the Sumerian cities and reverse-engineer alien technologies. Hence the U.S. orchestration of the first and second wars on Iraq.

Salla notes the U.S. ambassador's comment, when Hussein was first massing troops on the Kuwaiti border, that "we have no opinion on your Arab-Arab conflicts… such as your dispute with Kuwait." Naturally, French, Russian and German intelligence services have wished to prevent the exclusive U.S. exploitation of ET technology—hence their countries' opposition to the latest war. You can read the full story at www.exopolitics.org.

Sounds far-fetched, you say? Saddam's famous statue fell in April. By July 1, the Guardian of London reported that the Pentagon was planning for "a new generation of weapons, including hypersonic drones and bombs dropped from space, that will allow the US to strike its enemies at lightning speed from its own territory." By 2025, the Pentagon intends to possess a *reusable* hypersonic vehicle with a 12,000 pound payload, "capable of taking off from a conventional military runway and striking targets 9,000 nautical miles distant in less than two hours"—ten times the speed of sound! Of course it could all just be another scam, like Star Wars, for the military-industrial complex to make money.

Then again, what about the three-month synchronicity between Baghdad's fall and the Pentagon's r & d announcement? Could a rusting Anunnakian rocket ship, unearthed by Special Forces near Babylon, now be shipping to Area 51? Many of us scoff at such notions.

For there to have been a visit from space, first, there would have to exist intelligent and technologically-advanced alien civilizations. The probable number of such civilizations can be estimated by a formula called the Drake equation, which starts from the number of stars in the galaxy (around 200 billion) and multiplies by fractions representing the probability of certain requirements for the occurrence of alien astronomers. The outcome varies wildly depending on your guess as to the value of the intermediate fractions, but Carl Sagan put the number at roughly "1/10 the average lifetime of a technical civilization in years." The Drake equation is so malleable that it's not much use for proving anything, but I'm confident that the heavens are teeming with thoughtful life. Otherwise the cosmos would be too depressing, existentially. For example, Baywatch would turn into the most-watched tv show *of the space-time continuum.* George W. Bush would become the most powerful biological entity *in the history of the universe.*

In 1952, a panel commissioned by the CIA concluded that the biggest danger in UFOs was popular belief in them.

While the aliens are sure to be out there, the vastness of space may well discourage them from interstellar travel. Sagan said that there are "conceivable ways of doing it without bumping into fundamental physical constraints. And this suggests that it is premature to say that interstellar space flight is out of the question." Still, he saw a problem in the sheer number of stars worth exploring, coupled with the prohibitive expense of interstellar transport. For example, Bussard's ramjet, which Sagan deemed theoretically feasible, is a spacecraft several hundred miles wide.

It's easy to picture the contractors and decorated generals of Zeta Reticuli, slobbering a strange slime as they negotiate a fleet of Bussard Ramjets. Even so, resource constraints and (hopefully) planetwide protest would staunchly limit the number of interstellar craft that an alien society could build. Ten thousand alien civilizations, each launching ten thousand spaceships, could still visit only 0.05% of the stars in the Milky Way.

Sagan admitted the remote possibility of alien visitation, and admitted that he could think of no empirical test to refute the hypothesis that at least some UFOs are extraterrestrials (or angels, or future time travelers). He chalks up the popularity of the space-alien theory of UFOs, in part, to the scientific spirit of the times: "over the last few centuries science has systematically expropriated areas which are the traditional concern of religion." Aliens fit in comfortably in the universe of science, so the alien visitor has replaced the monster or savior of religion and myth. Also, people believe in E.T. visits because to do so resolves the ambiguity of UFOs, and because it generates novelty and excite-

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Ten thousand alien civilizations, each launching ten thousand spaceships, could still visit only 0.05% of the stars in the Milky Way.

ment. Finally, Sagan identifies military classification as a culprit. Where independent scientific investigation could help to dispel rumor, the military has tended instead "to classify everything in sight," especially the bizarre and unexplained incidents. David Jacobs' *UFO Controversy in America* (Indiana U. Press, 1975), the basis for much of what follows, is a detailed investigation into the lies, hypocrisies and about-faces of government UFO policy, confirming Sagan's judgment about its effects.

Americans have spotted UFOs since the widespread 1896 reports of odd men sailing in motor-driven "airships." But the modern wave of sightings began a week before the Roswell crash in 1947, when a pilot in Washington state saw nine inexplicable objects that "flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water." Thus was the flying saucer born into popular consciousness.

By the end of 1947 the Air Force had received numerous UFO reports, alarming some of the brass. Lieutenant General Nathan Twining argued that UFOs might be foreign nuclear devices, and therefore deserved "a priority, security classification and Code Name for a detailed study of this matter." This was to be Project Sign, created by the Air Force in 1948, renamed as Project Grudge and, later, Project Blue Book.

Following a frightening UFO encounter with a passenger jet, Air Force investigators wrote a top-secret "Estimate of the Situation," concluding that UFOs were probably of extraterrestrial origin. (General Vandenberg dismissed the report for being insufficiently probative, and it was declassified a few months later.)

In 1949, Project Grudge issued a report on 244 UFOs. Even though investigators could not account for one-fourth of the objects, Grudge decided the UFOs in themselves posed no threat to national security. But they noted the danger and promise of UFO hysteria: "There are indications that the planned release of sufficient unusual aerial objects coupled with the release of related psychological propaganda would cause a form of mild hysteria. Employment of these methods by or against an enemy would yield similar results. . . . governmental agencies interested in psychological warfare should be informed of the results of this study."

Grudge staff even thought the public awareness of Air Force investigations was a bad idea. So the Air Force issued a press release at the end of 1949, announcing the termination of Grudge. Meanwhile, the head of Air Force intelligence secretly informed staff that the disbanding order for Grudge was "premature" and that UFOs should continue to be studied through intelligence channels. A secret inquiry into green fireballs was promptly commenced.

In 1952, the CIA commissioned the Robertson panel, a group of scientists, to review results from Project Blue Book. Like the Grudge report three years earlier, the Robertson panel concluded that the danger in UFOs was popular belief in them. Saucer reports fomented a "morbid national psychology in which skillful hostile propaganda could induce hysterical behavior and harmful distrust of duly constituted authority." But instead of backing declassification, the panel recommended a government propaganda campaign. Secrecy thickened. The Air Force soon prohibited the public release of any information about an unidentified sighting. Unauthorized leakage of UFO reports became an Espionage Act offense, punishable by one to ten years in prison and a $10,000 fine. The new rules lasted until 1969 when the Air Force stopped studying UFOs.

In the meantime, the corporate media did its part for the UFO cover-up. In a 1958 CBS tv appearance, Donald Keyhoe, a prominent UFO personality, departed from the agreed-on script to discuss three real government documents: Twining's 1947 letter, the "Estimate of the Situation" report, and the Robertson panel report. Before he had finished a single sentence, producers cut the audio, censoring him. Even the Air Force disapproved this move, which predictably "enhanced rather than detracted from Major Keyhoe's position." Only in the 1970s, when the government had turned its paranoia to other imagined menaces, did television and press allow a fair hearing to citizen UFO watchdogs.

American agnosticism on the flying saucer question is thus a partial legacy of government mendacity and media complicity during the Cold War, although the root causes of UFO sightings and alien abductions are deep in the collective unconscious, discussed by Carl Jung in his 1959 book *Flying Saucers*. Jung thought UFOs were not wholly explicable as a psychological phenomenon, and suggested the possibility that they were "real material phenomena of an unknown nature" whose meaning was created by the viewer's unconscious.

The correspondence of strange sky things with humanity's sense of pending doom is a "meaningful coincidence," a "synchronistic phenomen[on]" generative of the UFO myth. Yesterday it was the Cold War and nuclear weapons, today it's terrorism and perpetual war that afflict us with an unsettled feeling. Who can blame Dr. Salla for seeing a meaningful coincidence in the government's war on the birthplace of civilization? CP

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(**IRAQ DIARY** *continued from page 3*)

fident.

Before the invasion most Iraqis wanted to see an end to Saddam Hussein because of the calamities he had inflicted on them, including two disastrous wars. Impoverished by sanctions, they wanted a return to some sort of normality. Expectations were high: they did not see why, once Saddam was gone, they should not live as well as Kuwaitis or Bahrainis. Instead, in the ferocious heat of the summer they have limited electricity, an intermittent water supply and a petrol shortage. Looting hasn't stopped.

The lesson of the three-week war was that Saddam had little real support. It should have been possible to isolate the senior echelons of the Baath Party, the security and intelligence services and the tribal factions on whom Saddam relied. The Baath Party had about half a million members, but most joined because they could not get a job as a manager, a teacher or even a driver without being a member. Yet from their heavily defended new headquarters US officials issued an edict on 16 May ordering sweeping de-Baathification. Every former member of the Party felt threatened. A few weeks later, the 400,000-strong Army was disbanded without compensation (this decision was hurriedly reversed a month later as guerrilla attacks increased).

Bush and Blair found it much easier to deal with Iraq when everything that went wrong could be blamed on Saddam. In his weekly press conferences in the National Convention Centre opposite the al-Rashid Hotel, Paul Bremer speaks almost as if Saddam were still in charge. To mounting scepticism and occasional derision from journalists he regularly explains that the lack of electricity and water is the result of sabotage by members of the old regime. The guerrilla attacks, he says, are the last throw of a small number of 'desperate men' still loyal to Saddam. 'Those who refuse to embrace the new Iraq are clearly panicking.' Everything will come right when Saddam is killed or captured; though, contradicting himself, Bremer has also said that the guerrilla attacks are not centrally organised.

Before the war ended the US had danced nervously around the prospect of a provisional government. Even Stalin felt that an indigenous authority would be a useful veil to mask imperial rule when he invaded Poland in 1944, but in Iraq it was soon obvious that the US did not want to share power. When Abu Hatem, a resistance leader who had been fighting Saddam for 17 years, captured the city of Amara (the only Iraqi Arab city to fall to local insurgents) in southern Iraq on 7 April, the CIA ordered him to leave within the hour.

Another problem is that the only Iraqi opposition parties with any demonstrable support inside the country are both Kurdish: the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, who have ruled their enclaves in northern Iraq for a decade. The others are all, by and large, dependent on foreign backers and are despised by most Iraqis as carpetbaggers. It is not just groups supported by the US, such as the Iraqi National Congress of Ahmed Chalabi or the Iraqi National Accord of Iyad Alawi, that are regarded with suspicion. So, too, is the Iranian-backed Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, led by Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, which is trying to present itself as the representative of the Shia Muslims who make up the majority of the Iraqi population. When I visited Hakim's office in Najaf one of his guards spoke to me in Farsi before switching to Arabic.

By the end of May, Washington had decided that a provisional administration made up of Kurds and the exiled opposition would not help the occupation. This was certainly right. If the reputation of the opposition among Iraqis was low before the war it was further blackened by the enthusiasm with which they confiscated government buildings and cars. 'They are just looters in suits,' an Iraqi told me in disgust. According to a story in Baghdad (rumours here are always high on supportive detail), one opposition group has managed to seize 67 buildings and 120 vehicles and engaged in a shoot out when the police tried to recover a car.

The alternative for the US—Saddamism without Saddam—is also difficult. The Iraqi state had largely dissolved in April. Other parts of it, like the Army, had been dismantled. Saddam himself had not been captured or killed. And all the while it was becoming obvious that the US and Britain, with casualties mounting, had only limited control of the country. By early July, Bremer and the CPA were showing greater enthusiasm for an Iraqi interim administration—with a broader base than the old exiled opposition—which could reconstitute the police and civil government. The old imperial recipes for controlling an occupied country under the auspices of a client regime are particularly difficult to apply in Iraq: the country is too divided between ethnic, religious, tribal and political groups. But the US, with Britain tagging along behind, has found that direct rule by military force alone is failing. It was so much easier when they could blame everything on Saddam Hussein. CP

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